

SISTER, MINE

PROLOGUE: A Half and A Whole

‘... And both must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other lives not ...’

Heaving a heavy sigh, Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft, prodded the stone basin on the desk, and the ethereal form of his new teacher for Divination receded back into the churning sea of silver memories in the Pensieve, reflecting his restless, troubled state of mind.

He pushed the chair back and rose; walking around the huge desk in his circular office. He stopped in front of his model of the solar system, eyes following the slow spinning of the planets, deducing time and date; thoughts miles and miles away.

It was already the thirty-first. Somewhere, maybe right now, a little baby would be born ... an innocent little baby, who knew nothing but the content feeling of being in the mother's warm embrace, who would grow up to have hopes and fears, wishes and dreams for the future. And yet his future was already decided, the uncaring hand of fate destining him to be the last hope of them all ... he alone would be able to oppose Tom, but how high the price?

How long he himself had tried!, and never succeeded ... until he heard those fateful words, and finally resigned himself to the fact that this Dark Lord was not his to vanquish, the task not meant for him; from then on doing nothing more than to react while waiting impatiently for the prophesised child to come.

But at the same time, the elevation while hearing the prophecy brought with it a bitter taste; for as thankful as he was, to finally have been given the one thing in this war they needed to win and end Tom's darkness, the price to pay was the ultimate price.

The future of this child would be a future that never came ... because in the end, while Tom would finally die, the prophecy stated he would take him with him.

The flames in fireplace rose abruptly in a green burst, almost flaring out over the marble mantelpiece, ripping him from his thoughts. With a few quick strides he was over at the fire, kneeling down in front of it while accepting the Floo call.

The greetings were almost swallowed by the sound of crackling flames, but they were not important, the message following it was.

“Harry James Potter was born at twenty-eight minutes to one, July the thirty-first.”

Then the speaker added more, achieving something that hadn't been done in over thirty years: the great Albus Dumbledore was thunderstruck.

“Come-come again?”

Dutifully, the speaker repeated his words.

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The moon watched in silence over the cottage that was now nothing more than a pile of rubble. The wind picked up and pushed clouds in front of the silver face of light, hiding this place of death in the cloak of the night; paying the last respect by shrouding it in merciful darkness. On the other edge of the property, the weeping willows sighed softly in the cold autumn breeze; as if they, too, were mourning, heads bowed in sorrow.

Only in the distance, the sound of sirens grew louder, and just moments later, the night was brightly lit by searchlights, and the quiet disrupted by blaring horns and the shouts of firemen that jumped of their vehicles and swarmed out; most concentrating on the collapsed house.

An order was quickly established. One group started to cordon off the onlookers, which had begun to arrive as well, while another sounded out the situation. After a short discussion, heavy engines carefully started to lift a part of the wall. With quick movements that spoke of at least some training, more men started to descend on the wreckage, removing beams and bricks, until a shout stopped any and every work.

A small bundle was lifted from between the fallen debris, red shimmering just below a tuft of black hair in the bright light of the lamps surrounding the place. The firemen took great care in handing it down until it reached a man on the lawn, who carried it over to an ambulance that was parking on the site.

“Almost thought he was dead, not movin’ or anything... but dead people can’t bleed like that, right?” he said, while handing it to paramedic inside the van.

The one he spoke to scowled at him, already tending to the wound on the baby’s head.

“No, but if I’m not able to do my work now, he will be.”

He jumped out of the ambulance, nodding.

“Right, doc, I’ll clear the way.”

He closed the doors behind him, and the driver started the engine, driving slowly through the crowd, along the path the fireman cleared for him; before reaching the lane and accelerating, speeding towards the hospital in the city many miles away.

“Who was it?” someone shouted. “Who survived?”

The fireman paused, before turning back around.

“You knew ‘em?”

“Of course,” said a woman indignantly. “Everyone in the village knew the Potters.”

“A little baby, male, black hair, green eyes.”

“Their son – Harry Potter. Anyone else?”

He looked over to his co-workers, who by now had cleared away all the rubble, and slowly shook his head.

An old man bowed his white head, and the woman uttered a sob. “Neither of his parents, only their son – no one else ...?”

“I’m sorry,” the fireman said.

The man nodded solemnly, kind, bespectacled blue eyes dulled in pain.

“What will happen to him now?” he asked.

The fireman shrugged.

“He got any relatives?”

The man frowned.

“I believe – why, yes, by rights, he should have an aunt. I remember Mrs. Potter mentioning a sister once...”

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Almost ten years later ...

In a small cupboard, Harry Potter opened his eyes, and many miles away, in a castle in the Scottish Highlands, Albus Dumbledore was having turbulent morning.

While Harry yawned and stretched his arms as much as that was possible in the cramped space, Dumbledore slowly removed the half-moon spectacles from his nose, polished them, and put them back on, but of course the paper Minerva McGonagall was holding accusingly

in front of him still said the same thing as before: Mr. H Potter, The Cupboard under the Stairs ...

The door to the place in question shook, as Aunt Petunia rapped sharply against it.

“Get up! Now! Breakfast!”

“Yes, Aunt Petunia,” mumbled Harry sleepily, trying to hold onto the fragments of his dream. It had been a good one. It included him, and he had a family – a real one, not one like the Dursleys. He had been forced to live with them, because they were his last living relatives, and he decidedly not liked them. Also, they didn’t like him either, and although he had learned how to get by, he often wished that he would be living somewhere else; somewhere that was more family.

His real family had died in a gas explosion that collapsed the house, when he had been very young, and he couldn’t remember them. But in his dream they had been alive, all three of them. He frowned, trying to remember more, but it was impossible.

In Hogwarts, the headmaster was severely trying the patience of his deputy.

“This is most interesting,” he admitted after a while.

“Most interesting?” she snapped. “That is your answer? I’d rather call it an inexcusable oversight! How in the world could we have missed that he was alive? James’ and Lily’s son, Albus! He’s been living with Muggles for almost ten years now!”

“Which probably was for the best,” Dumbledore said calmly, “given how –”

“We should have known regardless,” McGonagall interrupted him. “Imagine my surprise when I woke up this morning and one of the school owls was waiting for me. It carried a letter which read, and I quote: ‘I would be delighted to attend, if only someone would tell me where to get my school supplies. Sincerely, Harry Potter.’”

Said boy still hadn't left the cupboard. Aunt Petunia seemed to be getting impatient. She had clamoured in the kitchen with a frying pan, now her steps returned. "Are you up yet?" she demanded.

"Nearly," said Harry.

"Well, get a move on, I want you to look after the bacon. And don't you dare let it burn, I want everything perfect on Duddy's birthday."

Harry groaned.

"What did you say?" his aunt snapped through the door.

Meanwhile, Dumbledore was shaking his head. "The how and why is of no matter for the moment. Hagrid must've made a mistake, when he told me the boy was simply gone, all those years ago. Most regrettable, but he is no Auror, after all. The more pressing question is, how will we proceed?"

"Well, I thought that would be obvious," said McGonagall in clipped tones. "Someone has to visit the boy and start explaining. Thoroughly. And don't get me even started on you trusting Hagrid's word just like that."

"Yes, of course, of course ... forgive an old man a moment of shock, Minerva. I'm still not quite —" He straightened himself. "Now then. I believe I will go myself. This is very important news. It could change many things ..."

He trailed off, blue eyes watching sharply reactions and movements from behind the eccentric glasses.

McGonagall raised an eyebrow. "You yourself? I don't believe I can remember the last time you saw to a new student personally."

Dumbledore winced at the memory.

"Quite regularly until one time over fifty years ago, Minerva. Let's hope that this will not herald the start of another complete failure on my part, as it did back then."

His deputy headmistress nodded, not really knowing what he meant.

Dumbledore rose.

“Oh, by the way, Minerva; do not trouble yourself further with this matter. I will explain the circumstances to everyone that needs to know. The news of Harry Potter’s survival will be need to be broken in a gentle way – especially –”

“Yes, of course,” McGonagall said, her voice suddenly soft. “I hadn’t thought of that. I –” she sniffed and shook her head. “Never mind. I leave it in your capable hands, then?”

And without waiting for a response, she rose as well, and walked over to the door, to be carried down with the moving staircase.

Back at Number Four, Harry was finally dressed and now walking down the hall. Entering the kitchen, he found the table buried under a mountain of presents. As usual, Dudley had gotten everything he wanted. Harry never got any presents, much less anything he wanted. Of course, if he pretended to not like something, the Dursleys might give it to him – that had worked on occasions.

As he was turning over the bacon, Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen.

“Comb your hair!” he barked, by way of a morning greeting.

He did that about once a week, but combing never changed a thing: his hair simply grew that way, all over the place. One barber had once mentioned something about needing a miracle to fix it, and Uncle Vernon had shouted for half an hour at the poor fellow about there being no such things as miracles, before he’d pulled Harry into the car and left; driving almost twice the allowed speed and getting three fines in a row.

His Uncle was like that. Perhaps that could have had to do something with the one time he’d set another person’s hair – his teacher’s – on fire, pondered Harry. Strange things always happened around him. Of course, that wasn’t entirely bad – it had saved him more than once

from Dudley and his friends. It had gotten to a point where he could almost count on something to happen, whenever he needed it the most.

Like the one time Amy and Dennis had been playing with him in the park ... Dudley had come running, trying to scare them away (he didn't like Harry having anything like friends, not even two), when suddenly his jeans ripped open, leaving him stumbling around in his white underwear for everyone to see and not particularly intimidating at all.

Harry grinned at that memory. If he hadn't known better, he'd called it magical.

That reminded him of the letter an owl of all things had dropped off last night. A school of magic was a joke, of course, but maybe – maybe it wasn't? What if it was actually true? You never knew with things like that.

Mulling over that thought, Harry looked out of the kitchen window, where Mrs. Wright, the social worker, was talking with old Figgy, on the other side of the street. Mrs. Wright had taken to dropping by every now and then, after a particularly nasty incident with Dudley that had resulted in a broken arm and an extended stay in the cupboard, causing him to miss school.

Harry liked her.

He turned his head and watched Dudley who was leaning over the table, trying to count, using his fingers to help him. Unluckily for him, he had more presents than fingers.

“So I'll have thirty – thirty –”

“Thirty-nine, sweetums,” said Aunt Petunia.

“Oh.” Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. “All right then.”

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

“Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. ‘Atta boy, Dudley!”

He ruffled Dudley's hair.

At that moment the doorbell rang, and Aunt Petunia went to answer it, while Harry finished his bacon and Uncle Vernon proudly watched Dudley tearing off the paper of his presents. Seconds later, there was a shrill scream from the hallway.

Harry jumped off his seat and raced to the door, Dudley and Uncle Vernon close on his heels. Past his aunt, who was unable to utter a word and resorted to pointing, peaked an old man, with a long white beard and a pointed hat, strangely shaped glasses and blue eyes with a kind twinkle behind them. Harry liked him at once. He looked what he imagined his grandfather would look like, had he had one.

“Ah,” the man exclaimed. “Mr. Potter. There you are. I was just asking your aunt, but as you see, she is not quite able to answer right now – I fear, my arrival has something to do with that. It happens occasionally.”

“Err ...” said Harry blankly. “Who are you, sir? Do I know you?”

“Oh no, no – you simply look quite like your father and – hmm, my, but the relation is uncanny. My name is Albus Dumbledore – well, there are more, but people tend to get confused there anyway, so I leave them out, most times, if you know what I mean?”

“No,” said Harry.

He chuckled. “Well, regardless, I believe, you asked how to get your school supplies?”

Harry gaped at the man, his thoughts racing, realising all the implications, before a grin spread across his face. As it seemed, this was turning out to be the first birthday ever he would enjoy – and it was a birthday of Dudley's! Oh, the irony. And of course, Duddy's

perfect birthday, in turn, went down the drain, given his relative's aversion to anything unnatural. How very wonderful.

Realising that the visitor was still waiting for an answer, he nodded slowly. The old man beamed.

"Splendid, my boy, splendid. May I come in?"

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Harry frowned, as they entered the station where the trains to London passed, half an hour later. He followed Dumbledore over to the ticket machine, where he saw the old man's eyes twinkling merrily, as he carefully read the information printed on the machine.

"Press a green button ... London, yes. Yellow button ... hmm, that's a single ticket, Harry ... now the money?" He pulled a ten-pound-note from a pocket at the underside of his left sleeve and pushed it into the slit. The machine pulled it in, out of his hand.

"Oho!"

Dumbledore had followed the instructions exactly and was now staring expectantly at the ticket machine. He seemed to ignore the many stares he attracted, with his wide, purple robes, bent forwards and studying the box.

"Do wizards use the train to travel?" Harry asked in an undertone, looking around quickly at the other people, mostly men on their way to work.

Dumbledore answered without turning around.

"I dare say, they do not, Harry. Most wouldn't even know how to get the tickets out of this apparatus, and they wouldn't want to, even if they could. Which is a shame, the Muggles are so much more resourceful than we oftentimes care to admit."

“Ah!” he exclaimed a moment later, as the machine rattled and buzzed and the ticket appeared in the lower case. “It worked. Splendidly! We are off to a good start, Harry.”

He took the ticket, and suddenly, it had duplicated in his hands. Dumbledore gave one to Harry.

“There you go, my boy.”

Momentarily distracted from his original point, Harry followed Dumbledore to the gate and asked: “But why would wizards want to? I mean, you just made one ticket into two, just like that. If magic is simple like that, then surely there must also be magical ways to travel, better ones? I can see why they wouldn’t particularly care.”

Dumbledore pleasantly nodded a Good Morning to the employee of British Rail, who looked back at him and his attire suspiciously.

When they were standing on the platform, amongst the other commuters, he answered.

“We have quite a few means to get from one place to another. Most adult wizards can Apparate, that is, appear instantly wherever they like, with a few limitations. There is the Floo Network, families with children use that, usually. For larger groups of people we have Portkeys, and of course, some like to use a broom.”

He smiled, as if remembering an old joke.

“But the point is, just because we have all that, we shouldn’t forget that there is more, don’t you think? Muggles have come up with the most ingenious ways to make up for their lack of magic, and it would do us well to remember that.”

Harry shrugged.

“I’d be happy to trade all of that for magic anytime, sir. It’s not like you need it if you have magic. Magic sounds a lot more interesting.”

Dumbledore's smile dimmed somewhat, but whatever he was going to say was drowned out first by the voice of the stationmaster announcing the train and then the train itself, which pulled into the station with screeching brakes.

It was one with the old carriages, those with doors that opened like real doors and made a lot of noise if you put enough force behind your attempt to close them. Dudley always took great delight in slamming them shut with an extra-loud bang, like Uncle Vernon had shown him. The one time Harry had tried, he'd gotten a half an hour tirade on how not to behave like a rowdy with "public property that I paid with my tax money for".

But at least, he'd beaten Dudley in volume. Come to think of it, that might've been the reason for Uncle Vernon's fit of rage, too, Harry pondered as they boarded the train. He nodded to Amy and Dennis, who were exiting with their mums.

Dumbledore smiled.

"Your friends, Harry?"

Harry shook his head distractedly. The train was fairly full, but strangely enough, the two benches on either side of the door were still completely free. It was as if everyone but them gave those seats a wide berth.

"I don't have any friends, really. Dudley wouldn't allow it. That's only Amy and Dennis."

Harry stared at the free benches no one seemed to see for a bit longer, before he sat down and remembered his first question.

"Anyway, sir, why do we use the train, if we could already be there?"

Dumbledore was still standing, staring with an odd expression out of the open door. With a shake of his head, he took a seat next to Harry, and answered him, his face suddenly sombre.

“I imagine you have many questions, Harry. Questions you would like answered before you enter the magical world for the first time?”

The doors were slammed shut and the train pulled out of the station, accelerating quickly; leaving the station building behind.

He was right, Harry thought. Since he had gotten that letter, he'd had countless questions, which had only increased since the visit of the headmaster. But somehow, now that he had the chance to finally get answers, he couldn't think of where to start.

Dumbledore smiled kindly. “Perhaps I should start, and then we'll see what else you want to know?”

Harry nodded thankfully.

“Well, as you without doubt will have guessed by now, you are a wizard, Harry. Magic is very much real, though hidden from the normal eye. We have our own world, our own institutions —”

“And I never knew ... so all the strange things that happened – that was magic? All that?”

Harry spoke more to himself than to the old wizard next to him. “I did magic. I'm a wizard.” His face cleared, and he beamed up to Dumbledore, as though realising for the first time what it meant.

“Magic! I can do anything I want?”

There was a small pause, and when Dumbledore answered, he was looking at Harry intently.

“You have much to learn, Harry. And even so, quite a few things will be beyond your scope – be it because it's simply impossible, because it's outlawed, or because it's above of what you can or will be able to do. Only time will tell.”

Harry lowered his head dejectedly.

“I guess you’re right, sir. I doubt that I’ll be able to do much of anything.”

Dumbledore’s blue eyes twinkled at him.

“You will never know unless you try. And for that we have Hogwarts – the place where you will learn to control your gift, will be thought about the theoretics behind it and generally spend your time annoying our caretaker trying out what you’ve learned and perhaps use a broomstick for the delightful hobby of speeding recklessly over the grounds, if you’re anything like your father.”

He chuckled.

“Don’t tell Mr. Filch I said that, though.”

Harry felt excitement bubble up in him, a fierce, wild excitement, something he had never felt before, and he only listened with half an ear to what Dumbledore continued to tell him.

“Hogwarts is the finest school for magic in the world; but then of course I would say that. I’m sure my dear colleagues from other schools would claim the same of their schools.”

He chuckled again. “Well, anyway, upon your arrival, you will be sorted by your traits into one of four Houses. Those four Houses are Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Slytherin and Hufflepuff. Your parents, for example, were both in Gryffindor; typically that is –”

Harry knew that he probably was being rude, but he had to know. Nothing else was important.

“You knew my parents? Can you tell me about them?” he interrupted.

Dumbledore looked at him searchingly for a while. Harry fidgeted nervously on the Rail Blue covers of the bench, under the weight of the gaze.

"I knew them quite well, to my great joy," he said finally. "All through Hogwarts of course; and afterwards, I was proud to call them friends, perhaps not close ones, but friends all the same. We worked together with many other wizards and witches in a time of great distress and uncertainty, tirelessly against the foe; before and after your birth. I'm sure I could remember quite a few anecdotes, but they will have to wait, I fear."

Harry stared at him, hard.

"Why?"

He was surprised at his own vehemence, but didn't care overly much either. This was his chance. He couldn't think of anything that would matter to him more.

Dumbledore didn't seem to be offended, though.

"Because we still have a quite important and extensive topic to cover, and our time is limited," he said calmly. "You are welcome to come to my office any time once you're at Hogwarts, Harry. It makes for a better place to have talks like these anyway, I should think."

He hesitated for a second. "It'll be my pleasure to tell you of your parents. It's the least I can do."

Harry was silent, nodding finally, if reluctantly.

"So what did you mean? What I still have to know?"

Dumbledore looked at him thoughtfully, as if pondering how best to start. Outside, on the other side of the window, the first buildings of London rushed past.

"You need to know how your parents came to die."

"A gas explosion, sir."

Harry's tone was distant.

“The Dursleys told me. Apparently, it was quite big in the papers. The house was destroyed beyond repair.”

“Well, I’m afraid, that’s not quite accurate. You see, that was only the reason given to the Muggles – people like your family – ”

“My relatives, sir. That is all they are.”

“It still –”

“Tickets, please, sir.”

The guard who’d interrupted them turned towards Harry. She was slim and fairly young; with a blonde shock of hair flashing from under her dark blue cap that was surely not donned entirely according to the regulation, jauntily somewhat askew on one side of her head. Her equally blue uniform with the two golden stripes was in a very good condition, however; even though it seemed like she’d gotten one that was a number or two too small. The topmost button wasn’t closed, and it strained a bit below that.

“Your first time in London, dear?” she asked cheerfully, while she validated the tickets. Harry nodded.

“Well, have fun, then. Don’t get lost, though – it can be a bit overwhelming at first.” She smiled at Harry, and nodded at the Headmaster. “And a good day to you as well, sir.”

She handed them back their tickets and walked on. Dumbledore stroke his beard thoughtfully.

“She must certainly have a good working morale to reach us. Commendable. But where was I?”

“Telling me about how my parents really died,” supplied Harry helpfully.

“Ah, yes, as I said, the explosion wasn’t what really happened. Or rather, the house did explode, but from magical means, not Muggle ones. What happened in that time is not a tale you would tell for

enjoyment; dark and displaying the most undesirable side of our society, but you, of all people, deserve to know what really happened. So please bear with me, if I speak somewhat verbosely and don't spare you some details that others would ... I think you can handle the truth, Harry.

"You have to know that many years before you were born, a dark wizard started to rise. He began to gather followers that subscribed to many of the same ideas and ideologies that he did; most noticeably the demand that only real wizards witches should be allowed to learn magic, where the term 'real' was meant to encompass pure-blooded wizards, sometimes halfblooded, too; but never – and as a contrast to that – wizards and witches who where born to Muggles."

"Yes, there are those as well," he added, seeing Harry's questioning look.

"And you will find that not much has changed when you enter Hogwarts; quite a few still hold the same convictions and believes. I, personally, am of the opinion that what you make of your life is what matters, not the place you were happened to be born or the gifts you received, such as magic; as that is completely beyond your control. I'm doing my best to provide an equal and fair education for children from a Muggle background as much as for those from a magical background. Not everyone likes that, Harry. And so, Voldemort – that was what he called himself – found his first followers among those that were too proud of their heritage and too short-sighted to see where their path on his side would lead them: pure-blooded Slytherins."

Dumbledore sighed.

"Pride can be a terrible thing, Harry. It pushed people who were not really bad men on the dark path, and later kept them imprisoned in a trap they had laid and entered themselves. Voldemort, however, grew quickly more influential ..."

Harry was listening with rapt attention as Dumbledore spun a tale of the rise of one man, powerful, ruthless and without mercy. The sunlight that streamed through the carriage window seemed so very

far away and dimmer than it should have been. Instead, as he told of his horrible deeds, fascinating in a sickening twisted way, a strange, unsubstantial darkness begun to creep between them, as though it left the words Dumbledore spoke and seeped out into the space around them.

“But what about you, sir?” Harry asked. “What did you do? Didn’t you fight?”

Dumbledore heaved another heavy sigh.

“Oh, I did, Harry, I did. I founded a secret organisation to oppose Voldemort, when it became clear that the Ministry was infiltrated by his sympathisers and spies, together with many other brave wizards and witches, among them your parents. But alas, it wasn’t enough; I, too, had seen too late what was happening; had been blind to what was to come, when I should have known. Eleven years, Harry. Imagine eleven dark years, with no hope, no peace. Just day after day, spent in fear for your friends and relatives, days filled with terror and death and madness. That is what the reign of Voldemort – the reign of darkness – truly means.”

He paused for a long while, looking at Harry in an intent way as though to impress on him the full meaning of what he just said. Harry felt uncomfortable under his grave gaze; feeling a shiver running down his spine at the faint sense of foreboding that perhaps there might be more to Dumbledore’s words. He was relieved when Dumbledore looked down and picked up his tale again.

“It was literally days away from the complete fall, where he would’ve taken over the shell of the Ministry, and then attacked Hogwarts afterwards. We knew it was hopeless; he was planning a last great offence, and after that, it would’ve been over. But for reasons that may never be revealed completely, he decided to attack your parents first, prior to crushing the last resistance with his last stroke.”

Dumbledore’s voice was grave.

“Quite possibly, he wanted to have them out of the way, first; your parents were as great a wizard and a witch as I’ve seen in a long

while, Harry. They had been a quite painful thorn in his side for a while already, and maybe he even wanted to convince them to join them for a last time (they had always vocally declined before, of course), but regardless, he appeared in the village you lived, on the night of Halloween ten years ago. You were one year old, then. He came to your house, fought with your parents and murdered them. That was their real death. They died to protect you, Harry. Never forget that.”

Dumbledore fell silent. Harry scrunched up his forehead. When Dumbledore seemed content to stare out of the window, he finally asked: “But then ... what happened then? After he killed them?”

Dumbledore turned his head back around.

“Oh, afterwards? Afterwards he vanished. He was simply gone. Why would he leave, Harry?”

Harry felt more confused then ever.

“Err, I don’t know, sir – from what you told me, he had no reason to go, did he? If he was as near to the ultimate victory as you said.”

Dumbledore nodded affirmatively.

“Quite, Harry. So?”

“So he left involuntarily? Something happened, and he was forced away?”

“A definite possibility. But what?”

“Magic, sir? He tried something that killed him?”

Harry attempted to come up with a possible cause, while Dumbledore nodded encouragingly next to him.

“He must have done it after he fought with my parents, and before he was able to kill me as well. He wouldn’t have spared me voluntarily, right?”

"I dare say not, as terrible as it is, Harry. You would have been next."

"So he did something in between, but why? If the only thing he wanted to do was to kill ... or perhaps ... he did try to kill me and something went wrong?"

Now Dumbledore was beaming.

"My conclusion exactly, Harry; supported by the way the house was blown apart, with the centre of the explosion where your nursery had been. Although I'm not so sure he completely died; my greatest fear is that he somehow cheated death, stayed alive when he shouldn't have and is still somewhere out there, only waiting for the right time to return, be it now, in ten years or fifty. But all we can do in the meantime is prepare and hope that this time never comes."

Now Harry fell silent. He had much to ponder. He felt like his world had been torn apart and pieced together again, but this time upside down or inside out. Nothing he had known was true. Not his life, neither what he'd thought of his parents. He shook his head, confused, and was almost happy when the speaker in the ceiling announced Paddington Station, ripping him from his thoughts and clearing his mind.

What he'd known or not known until now wasn't important. Important was what he did with the knowledge he now had. And he felt one wish stand out above all others.

As he left the train with Dumbledore, his decision was clear.

"Sir ... are there graves for my ... parents?"

"Yes, they are buried at Godric's Hollow, the village where they lived."

"Then I'd like to see them"

"I'm not sure that is a wise idea, Harry."

“Why not? I think that I’ve earned the right, considering that everything I knew about them until now would have fitted on a quarter page, and even that little was a lie, wouldn’t you say?”

Immediately afterwards, he froze; realising what he’d just blurted out. He nervously waited for the reaction to his biting tone. But Dumbledore just studied him for a long while, while all around them the people were pushing and shoving.

Finally he nodded.

“Perhaps you are right, Harry. We will have to make haste afterwards and you will not be able to explore Diagon Alley for your leisure, but if that is how you wish to spend your time?”

He breathed, relieved.

“Yes. I’d really like to see the graves.”

Dumbledore nodded again, and led Harry through the station concourse, to a door with a sign that read ‘Personal only’. The lock clicked open, and if Harry hadn’t been looking for Dumbledore’s wand this time, he wouldn’t have seen it, just like the times before, discretely hidden from view with his long sleeves.

They entered the small, dark room that smelled acidly sharp of detergents, and Harry tried to breathe as little as possible.

Dumbledore shut the door again, barring out every single ray of light, and said: “Grab on, Harry.”

Harry, uncomfortably squeezed against a hard rack, felt fabric, Dumbledore’s robe, and realised that he wanted him to get a hold of his arm. As soon as he had closed his hands around it, he felt a sudden pressure on him, a feeling as if he were being squeezed through an entirely too small rubber tube. He was going to implode.

~*~

Disorientated, Harry stumbled and almost fell to the ground.

“Bloody Hell! What was that?”

Dumbledore smiled and looked outrageously unaffected by the trip they just had made.

“That, Harry, was your first-time-apparition. I took you along with me. Don’t worry, you’ll get used to the feel.”

Harry rather doubted that, but said nothing; choosing to look around instead.

They’d reappeared on a wide grassy field, on one end bordered by old white poplars, whose silver leaves rustled softly in the light summer breeze. On the other end, scattered houses were visible, red and covered with black shingle roofs. A stony grey church tower rose above them with a flat peak; and even higher above, a red kite was circling in the clear blue sky. The whole place was nestled into a small valley with hills all around, partly forested; Harry could see a small road winding its way past the natural obstacles.

Dumbledore made a sweeping gesture.

“Welcome to Godric’s Field. Over there is the village of Godric’s Hollow, the place where your parents lived. The house, or rather what is left of it, is on the other side of the town, down the main road where it turns into an earth road – Hollow Lane, I believe it is called. However, the graves are on this side of the village.”

He started to walk across the field, the town to his left and the poplars to his right, and Harry followed his lead. With an astounding agility, Dumbledore started to climb over an old wooden fence at the end of the field. They moved in a slight curve, walking now away from the village, up and partly and around the hill.

Godric’s Hollow vanished on the other side of the hill, and Harry glimpsed a dark shade through the trees; a larger house most likely, further up the hill to his left, when a strange feeling washed over him. But it left as soon as it had appeared, and Harry paid it no mind; because through a group of birch trees ahead of them, he saw a few

rows of stones, obviously gravestones in the way they were arranged. There even was a building that could have been a mausoleum.

They passed the birches, and Dumbledore pointed to the end of the first row on his left.

“Over there, Harry.”

Harry went straight to the tombstones the Headmaster had pointed out, overtaking Dumbledore’s lead.

He stopped dead in front of them, staring at the inscription. Engraved in polished granite, shining and blinking brightly in the sun, there were written two names and one sentence.

Lily Anne Potter & James Harold Potter

Their sacrifice gave the world a hope.

Harry wasn’t sure what he felt right then. He had never known his parents. When he tried to come up with the earliest memories he could recall, it was the Dursleys. Always the Dursleys. Before that was only a flash of green, sometimes in his dreams, and otherwise only darkness. But at night, when the house was silent, he’d imagine what it would be like – if he could remember – if he had a family ... family ...

He sighed. Perhaps he should have felt close to them here or something here, but the truth was, the stone was silent. It told no stories, shared no memory of their life. It was a grave, a place to think of them, but not a place to find them.

And while he stared at the grey stone, he couldn’t really relate. He didn’t feel sadness, only a deep longing, for something he never had. It was a memorial – but what were you supposed to do there when you had no memory? And desperately, he tried to fight against the feeling that was creeping up in him: that he was staring at the graves of two strangers.

They are your parents! a voice shouted. How can they be strangers?

But it was so unreal. Two names in stone. For all his previous excitement, nothing else was really here, other than perhaps the certainty that yes, he'd had parents at one point, and yes, they were dead. For everything else, this place held no answers; he had to look elsewhere.

He moved sideways to a smaller tombstone on the left.

Harry James Potter

End of a War, Beginning of a Future

Harry read the verse and scowled. This one was even worse than the one on his parents' stone. Who had commissioned them? He very much preferred the smaller, inexpertly carved words that were clearly added afterwards; irregularly and somewhat messily:

One half of a whole.

I miss you.

Below, on the grave, a few yellow narcissi started to display their first, still closed blooms, at the end of June, completely out of the season. Another month, his birthday, and they would try to outshine the sun. His eyes moved up to the name again, and he froze. Only then he realised what he had been doing.

He was staring at his own grave.

Next to him, Dumbledore was waiting patiently for Harry to make the connection.

Harry felt his throat constrict. This couldn't be real. It had to be a joke – it had to – had – because – otherwise –

"You thought ... you thought – I was – dead?" he choked out.

He felt like would pass out any second now. The world was spinning around him. From far away he heard Dumbledore's words, saw him nodding.

"We thought you died. In fact, the wizarding world still believes that. We were mistaken. The general opinion is that Voldemort tried to continue his killing after he was done with your parents, but the magic backfired, and both of you died in the subsequent explosion. Neither of your bodies was ever found, and it marked the end of his terror; hence the inscription on the stone. I apologise for the less than stellar verses, but the Ministry made those ... you know how bureaucrats are, I imagine."

Harry tried to breath steadily. In and out ... in ... and in hot rush, the anger came and washed away his light-headedness.

"Dead – you were mistaken? You thought I was dead and I wasn't! That simply is – that is –"

He had no words for what he wanted to say. Dimly he realised that he was shouting.

"I imagine it's only lucky that no one found me, or I might have actually ended up in there alive, in another mistake, considering this! Were they completely stupid? I mean, don't you have any spells or something that can detect humans? And experts, who know what they're doing?"

Dumbledore winced noticeably.

"I understand your anger, Harry, but please keep in mind how it was back then – it was pure chaos, Voldemort was gone, the Ministry in shambles, the Muggles close to finding out everything about our world. They were swarming all over the places, trying to figure out what happened – and the person who was sent here was restricted in his use of magic. Obviously, a more thorough examination has been done later, but by then, you were truly gone.

"I imagine Muggle authorities found you, and you were then brought to your only living relatives. Perhaps that was even for the best – you

were never in any danger from those that wanted revenge on you, as long as they believed you dead. That will change now, Harry. You'll be in considerably more danger than you used to be."

"I really don't care," fumed Harry. "Danger, ha! Not more danger than from Dudley accidentally choking and drowning me, I bet – they had to use CPR on me! And now ... Headmaster, would I have been left at the Dursley's, had anyone in a position to make that decision known of me?"

"Well, that is a hypothetical question, of course –"

"Yes or no? Do you leave famous children that just saved your arse in the care of Muggles, considering what you just told me of the dislike of them by some?"

Dumbledore sighed.

"It depends on who would have made that decision, but yes, there is the possibility that you would have ended up in a wizarding family. I must add, though –"

"So whoever declared me dead is to blame for me ending up with the Dursleys. Just great." Harry kicked a stone into the bushes, clenching his fists. "If I meet them, I'll –"

"No, Harry you will not."

Now the Headmaster interrupted him, looked at him sternly through his glasses.

"I brought you here, because it seemed to me as though you were mature enough to handle the truth. I would hate to have misjudged you. Being mature means being able to forgive. It was a consequence of the circumstances surrounding your supposed death, as I said, not done with malicious intents. Will you be able to do that, Harry?"

Harry looked up to the wizened wizard, who had now changed from grandfatherly to purely headmaster-ly; and swallowed his anger.

“Yes, sir,” he mumbled; chastised, if very reluctantly. “It’s just that I could have been ... I mean ...”

“I don’t presume to know how you feel, Harry. But you mustn’t think like that. It doesn’t do to lose oneself in what-ifs and could-have-beens. That path leads only to anger and bitterness. Don’t bemoan what you have not, make the best with what you’re given. Your parents fought Voldemort to give you this chance at life, and he killed them for it. Use it to make them proud.”

Dumbledore was looking at him gravely. Harry stared into the distance.

His parents were dead. He never knew them; this place held no answers. He would look elsewhere.

~*~

“Well, there you are, boy. Platform nine – platform ten. Your platform should be somewhere in the middle, but they don’t seem to have built it yet, do they?”

It was September the first, and they were standing in the busy station where the trains to the north of the Kingdom arrived and departed. And Uncle Vernon was quite right, of course. There was a big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one next to it, and in the middle nothing, nothing at all.

However, during a short but exhilarating visit of the magical Diagon Alley, the headmaster had explained a few more things, among them how to get onto the right platform.

So he pushed his trolley with his huge trunk towards the dividing barrier between the two platforms, turning around on the way, to get a good view on everyone, and relished in the completely flabbergasted look of his relatives’ faces, as he vanished backwards into the brick wall.

Passing through a solid wall was a strange experience. But before he could think further about that rather disturbing idea, he emerged on the other side, at once enveloped by a busy hum of chattering, laughter and shouts. This part of the station was older-looking than the one he had left. Where he had just passed through the wall was now a wrought-iron archway; it bore the words 'Platform Nine and Three-Quarters'.

A puffing sound made him finally turn around, and for a time, he simply stood there and stared. Sure, he'd seen Diagon Alley, but that was not nearly enough for magic to lose its novelty. He saw numerous families exchanging pleasantries with each other and harried children pushing carts toppling with luggage. Robes and cloaks had replaced shirt and tie, and the general air felt thick with life.

It was a far cry from the bored, tired faces of the daily commuters that had littered the station before. The puffing cut through the buzz of voices again. His eyes made out its source; a scarlet steam engine, letting out blasts of steam vigorously. A simple sign above the gleaming steel behemoth identified the train as the 'Hogwarts Express', to depart at eleven o'clock.

It was a few moments before he could take his eyes off the impressive transport, finally starting to move. He pushed his cart through throngs of people, staring at the colourful figures around him with amazement while trying his best not to stand out. Most of the young students were like himself – a standard trunk and a caged owl; others had cats and for one tall boy, it even was a colourful talking parrot.

But what really caught his eye was the casual use of magic. It was everywhere. He felt his excitement reach new heights, just watching bags shrinking and growing, hands reached into purses up to elbows, and people appearing and disappearing as if it were the most normal thing in the world. And it was, he reminded himself. He would learn to do it as well.

Still, he couldn't help to watch the conductor and his assistant directing flying suitcases into the train, and burst out laughing when they noted their audience and started to put on a show, with sparkling

wands swishing in exaggerated gestures and somersaulting suitcases trying to outdo each other. Then he heard giggling from his right and hastily moved on, realising that it had to have been painfully obvious for anyone watching him that he had never seen much magic before.

He slowly turned his head, inconspicuously looking for the source of the giggle. His eyes landed on a gaggle of chattering girls near the train. They were laughing together, but luckily, no one was pointing at him. All eerily similar in hairstyle and practically identical in their neat Hogwarts robes, one girl stood out nonetheless. She was tall and black-haired, standing in the centre, holding the attention of the small group and doing the talking, glancing at her audience of friends every so often as she recounted some amusing experience.

She turned to face another girl, running a hand through her impossibly dark tresses and looking up.

“Well, as I told Daphne, Pansy, I was –”

For a moment, he was in her line of sight. She was looking through the crowd, staring directly at him. Harry felt a peculiar sense of déjà vu, but the moment passed as he was swept away with the masses of eager witches and wizards. A redheaded man rushing to hug his lanky sons blocked his vision. Somewhat annoyed, he pushed his trolley around the large family; and since he wasn't looking ahead, he almost crashed into an old woman with a hat that for some strange reason included a stuffed vulture. He heard her prim voice scratch out behind him: “Do you have your toad, Neville?”

“Of course, Gran – right here – no, I mean ... err, I don't know?”

Her response was lost in the babble, scraping of heavy trunks, and the disgruntled hoots of owls, as he walked on more carefully, pushing further through the crowd. He stopped at a small kiosk selling snacks and sweets. Cauldron Cakes, Oven-Fresh, he read, and Tasty Pasties. The colourful poster next to it displayed jumping frogs – meaning, the frogs did actually jump within the picture, all over the place and between the letters of the text that said: Chocolate Frogs – NEW! Limited Girl Who Lived Series: In every 87th Frog!

This seemed to be especially popular. Harry watched how silver Sickles changed hands and children eagerly ripped open the box and wrappings, shouting triumphantly and holding a card into the air or moaning in disappointment when they didn't find what they'd been looking for in one of the frogs. The money clinking in his pocket, Harry stepped closer, deciding to get something himself. He'd never had money before, and he figured it was time to start spoiling himself a bit. He bought a box of Chocolate Frogs from the smiling witch at the stand and three Pumpkin Pasties for the journey.

Stowing away the pastries, he opened the box and took out a frog. It squirmed in his hands and tried desperately to jump away. Grinning, he let it, before catching it easily in midair. He chanced a look back but saw that the girl from earlier had resumed her story, her friends breaking into quiet giggles, not looking at him. Only a little red-haired girl on her mother's hand stared at him awed.

He scowled at her, turning away and looking at the card which had been under the wrappings. The picture showed a girl in a silver robe, with silky raven hair, falling past her shoulders. On her forehead, a bit left of the centre, he saw a fine scar, shaped like a lightning bolt. She was staring at him unblinkingly with striking green eyes.

Familiar green eyes. He stared at his own pale reflection in one of the windows of the coaches. A flash of black disappeared inside further down. And then, in one breathless moment, there was a sudden flash of insight. A frightening, exhilarating idea – it was improbable beyond measure, completely mad –

His heart beat heavily in his chest while his eyes jumped to the name on the card; and then it seemed to simply stop. With shaking hands, he read it, again and again.

Jennifer Anne Potter.

A/N:

My take on the TWL-Genre, and it uses about the only true reasoning to create this particular AU there is (no, I won't tell you what that is. You'll see :D)

The story is a fifth year AU, which means that other than a few key scenes, to show what changed and how, I'll skip the first four years. Canon-rehash has been done to death; and I hope to write a TWL-fic that is different - not exactly like the books, for once with a sound set-up, without parents that "forget" they have another child, and basically void of whatever other clichés you can come up with.

If you see any of them in here, leave me a review-kick the arse so that I can fix it.